



Congressman

John M. McHugh

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin

Ryan Vaart

(202) 225-2539

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JOHN M. McHUGH
MWR PANEL HEARING ON MWR PROGRAMS**

March 12, 1998

Today the Panel will hear testimony concerning Service Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs. We have two distinguished panels of witnesses. The first, representing America's enlisted soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, are the senior Non-commissioned officers of the uniformed services, and will address the value of these programs from the point of view of those whom the programs are supposed to serve – the troops. The second panel, who are DOD and Service MWR program chiefs, will address overall DOD and service MWR policy and funding issues.

First, I want to set the stage. Last week, I believe this Panel sent a clear message – we are solidly behind the resale system. We support the resale system for the many reasons so eloquently presented by our witnesses and Members during last week's hearing. I want to reemphasize today, however, that one of the primary reasons that resale, and exchanges in particular, are so important, and one of the reasons they enjoy this Panel's strong support, is the financial contribution they make to MWR programs – about \$330 million this year; or, stated another way, about 17% of all the non-appropriated funds available to the Services. The loss of any or all of that money would severely harm MWR programs at all levels.

Just as this Panel seeks to protect and enhance the resale benefit, we also seek to protect and enhance MWR programs. These activities, which include such programs as fitness centers and child care centers, are vitally important to the readiness and quality of life of our troops and their families.

To protect and enhance MWR programs, the Congress and the military Services should agree on precisely what should be offered, and we should insure that funds, both appropriated and non-appropriated, are adequately applied to current day operations as well as future capitalization. As both the active and reserve components of all services have shrunk, bases have closed both in the United States and overseas, and the force has become more married than single, it is time for DOD and this Panel to examine the consistency and rationale for specific program offerings, and the level of commitment, that is, appropriated fund support, from each of the Services.

I will call on both panels of witnesses to provide their expertise on the scope of programs that should be offered, the levels of appropriated funds provided by their respective Services, and their commitment to capital improvements.

Non-appropriated funds by definition convey the idea that the money belongs to the troops, not the taxpayer. Unfortunately, the Services generally are not meeting departmental guidance for appropriated fund support of MWR programs. Any shortfall means that soldier money must make up the difference and fund programs for which taxpayer dollars should have been made available, but were not.

I am very pleased that the services' senior NCOs have agreed to appear before us. We look to them for a straightforward assessment of the value of programs – where we need to add, where others have outlived their usefulness, and whether DOD and service wide standards are even necessary. I hope they will also tell us about the condition of facilities. One disturbing trend I have noticed during my tenure as Chairman is the tendency to spend funds on current day operational needs, and ignore long term capital improvements that are so vital to the long term health of programs.